

## Message Text

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16

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05 FDRE-00 SR-02 ORM-01 IO-10

/067 W

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O R 110910Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2301

AMEMBASSY SAIGON IMMEDIATE

INFO CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 1474

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, SN, VS

SUBJECT: GOS DISPOSITION VIETNAMESE C-130

REFS: A. SINGAPORE 1339; B. SINGAPORE 1452; C. SINGAPORE 1390;  
D. SAIGON 4622

SUMMARY: THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS INFORMED US THAT SVN CAN HAVE THE  
C-130 BACK IF WE AGREE TO TAKE THE 56 REFUGEES OFF THEIR HANDS.  
END SUMMARY.

1. GEORGE BOGAARS, PERMSEC OF FOREIGN MINISTRY, CALLED ME IN TODAY  
TO EXPLAIN GOS POSITION ON VNAF C-130 AND 56 REFUGEES WHO FLED TO  
SINGAPORE APRIL 3 (REF A). HE READ FROM A TWO-PAGE BRIEF WHICH  
HAD BEEN SIGNED BY DR. GOH, ACTING PRIME MINISTER, AND WHICH WAS  
IN RESPONSE TO MY CALL OF APRIL 10 (REF B). SUBSTANCE OF POSITION  
IS FOLLOWING:

A) C-130 AND REFUGEES MUST BE TREATED TOGETHER -- AS ONE NOT  
TWO PROBLEMS.

B) C-130 HAD BEEN IMPOUNDED AS STOLEN PROPERTY UNDER SINGAPORE'S  
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CRIMINAL CODE AND HENCE CERTAIN LEGAL PROCEDURES HAD TO BE GONE

THROUGH BEFORE IT COULD BE RELEASED.

C) REFUGEES WERE HIGHLY EMOTIONAL AND THREATENED SUICIDE IF FORCED TO RETURN TO VIETNAM. SINGAPORE TOOK THESE THREATS SERIOUSLY. SINGAPORE WISHED TO AVOID ANY "MESSY INCIDENT" WHICH MIGHT MAKE SINGA-

PORE APPEAR IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD AS HEARTLESS AND BRUTAL. FOR SAME REASON THEY WOULD NOT AGREE TO ADMITTING VIETNAMESE ARMED GUARDS FOR PURPOSE OF FORCING REFUGEES TO RETURN.

D) GOS WOULD PREFER THAT AN AMERICAN CREW BE USED TO FLY PLANE BACK TO VIETNAM SINCE A VIETNAMESE CREW MIGHT SIMPLY FLY PLANE TO KUALA LUMPUR OR JAKARTA THUS CAUSING SINGAPORE EMBARRASSMENT WITH ITS NEIGHBORS.

E) IF THE UNITED STATES WERE TO AGREE TO TAKE REFUGEES TO AMERICA OR SOMEWHERE ELSE, EXPEDITIOUS ACTION COULD BE TAKEN TO RELEASE THE C-130.

F) WHATEVER IS DONE, THE GOS HOPES IT CAN BE DONE QUIETLY.

2. IN SUMMARY, GOS WILL NOT FORCE THE REFUGEES TO RETURN AND WOULD NOT PERMIT SVN TO DO SO; GOS WILL NOT ALLOW THEM TO STAY INDEFINITELY OR SETTLE IN SINGAPORE; THEY WILL NOT RELEASE THE PLANE UNTIL THE REFUGEES ARE TAKEN OFF THEIR HANDS; AND THE UNITED STATES SEEMS TO BE THE ONLY COUNTRY THAT MIGHT BE WILLING TO DO SO.

3. I TOLD BOGAARS I THOUGHT THEIR POSITION WAS UNREASONABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE. THE IMMEDIATE AND CRITICAL NEED WAS TO GET THE AIRCRAFT BACK IN SERVICE IN VIETNAM; THE REFUGEE PROBLEM, WHICH WAS ESSENTIALLY A PROBLEM BETWEEN THE GOS AND GVN, COULD BE SORTED OUT LATER. WE DIDN'T WANT TO APPEAR TO BE AIDING THESE PEOPLE IN THEIR ILLEGAL FLIGHT FROM VIETNAM BY TAKING THEM TO THE UNITED STATES. THIS, I SAID, WOULD ONLY ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO LIKEWISE WHICH WOULD MAKE MATTERS WORSE. I SAID QUITE BLUNTLY THAT THE PROPOSED DEAL WAS UNPRINCIPLED AND THAT THE RESULT WAS THEY WERE DENYING SVN THE USE OF A VITALLY NEEDED AIRCRAFT. BOGAARS SAID HE "HAD A CERTAIN SYMPATHY" FOR OUR POSITION, BUT HE WAS SERVING ONLY AS A CONDUIT IN CONVEYING THE GOS VIEW TO US. BUT, HE SAID, IF WE LET THE PLANE GO, WE WOULD HAVE NO BARGAINING LEVERAGE TO GET RID OF THE REFUGEES.

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ONE FINAL TOUCH WAS HIS REMARK THAT WHOEVER TAKES THE REFUGEES WOULD BE EXPECTED TO PAY FOR THE FOOD CONSUMED BY THE REFUGEES WHILE IN SINGAPORE.

4. I AM PREPARED TO GO BACK TO DR. GOH ON THIS BUT BEFORE DOING SO I NEED SOME GUIDANCE ON THE REFUGEES. SHOULD I TAKE THE POSITION THAT THIS IS A PROBLEM TO BE RESOLVED SOLELY BY THE GOS AND GVN? THIS IS THE LINE I HAVE TAKEN THUS FAR. OR DOES THE DEPARTMENT HAVE

OTHER SUGGESTIONS? IF WE CAN OFFER SOME REALISTIC HOPE THAT THE REFUGEES WILL BE RESETTLED EVENTUALLY ELSEWHERE, THEY MAY BE WILLING TO ACCEPT THAT, BUT OUR ASSURANCES WOULD HAVE TO BE PRETTY FIRM. WOULD THE UNHCR IN GENEVA BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING FOR THESE PEOPLE? DR. GOH IS NORMALLY A REASONABLE AND COOPERATIVE MAN, BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT THE GOS IS AFRAID OF ATTRACTING A LARGE NUMBER OF UNWANTED REFUGEES IF THEY ALLOW THIS GROUP TO STAY AND HENCE THEY ARE TRYING TO ARRANGE A DEAL WHICH GETS THEM OUT OF THE PROBLEM. CRONK

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## Message Attributes

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**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
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**Errors:** N/A  
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